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50% OF MAHA COVID SAMPLES SHOWING DOUBLE MUTATIONS

Genome sequencing showed presence of variants B.1.617-E484Q and L452R in nearly half of the samples, pointing to their role in the spike

HEALTH MINISTRY YET TO GIVE A CLEAR PICTURE

The B.1.617 variant has also been found in samples from eight states but the proportion is much smaller than Maharashtra's. Data from other countries suggest that E484Q can escape antibody neutralisation, while L452R is known to increase infectivity. The Health Ministry, however, says there is no epidemiological link yet between the mutants and the second wave

LOCALLY DOMINANT VARIANTS FOUND

- Signals of locally dominant mutations driving outbreaks — N440 in Kerala and B.1.618 in West Bengal — have also been noted
- Maharashtra added 63,729 cases to its tally amid a crippling shortage of oxygen and hospital beds; 398 deaths were reported
- Karnataka, too, reeling under plasma, bed and drug shortage

16,79,740

ACTIVE CASES IN INDIA; RECOVERY RATE HAS FALLEN TO 87.23%

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EXPRESS READ

Pandemic shadow over Karnataka bypolls

Belagavi: The Covid surge hit bypolls to Belagavi Lok Sabha and Basavakalyan Assembly constituencies on Saturday, which saw fewer voters. P4

78.36 pc voting in Bengal 5th phase polls

Kolkata: Around 78.36% voter turnout was seen till 5 pm on Saturday, across 45 assembly constituencies of West Bengal, during fifth phase of voting. P10

WITH THIS ISSUE

MAKING WAVES

PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

CAPITAL CRISIS ON OXYGEN SUPPLY

Delhi and Mumbai running out of medical oxygen; situation 'very serious', says Kejriwal

PARVEZ SULTAN @ New Delhi

AS Covid-19 cases in Delhi saw an alarming spike of 24,000 within a single-day span — a jump of 4,500 from the previous day — Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal termed the situation "very serious and worrisome" and said the city was facing shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir.

The Chief Minister, however, added that he had spoken to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan to ensure adequate supply of oxygen and reserve more beds in central government hospitals, including in intensive care units (ICUs), for Covid-19 patients.

"Supplies of oxygen and Remdesivir are running short. Because cases are increasing rapidly, we are facing shortage of oxygen, Remdesivir and Tocilizumab (another drug) though a few days ago our assessment was that there is enough stock. Today, I had a meeting with senior officials and the scarcity of these three articles was noticed," said Kejriwal while addressing a digital press briefing.

Stating that the Central Government has always helped Delhi in its fight against the pandemic, the Delhi CM said he is hopeful that this time too, the Centre would come to its aid.

"I spoke with Harsh Vardhanji and requested for more beds in the central government-run hospitals and adequate supply of oxygen, Remdesivir, and Tocilizumab. The Central Government has 10,000 beds and I have requested that 50% of them should be reserved for Covid patients. Private hospitals are facing more shortage of oxygen," said Kerjiwal.

He said the health infrastructure has its limitations and that beds, including those in ICUs, are running out fast. However, the government is making efforts to arrange more beds, particularly with oxygen facilities. He said the government is making arrangements for 1,300 beds in Yamuna Sports Complex and Commonwealth Games Village at Akshardham.

At Radha Soami Satsang Beas campus, initially 2,500 beds will be available and 2,500 more will be added subsequently, he added. P9

NATIONWIDE

	APRIL 16	APRIL 17
Fresh cases	2,33,351	2,40,423
Recoveries	1,23,354	1,25,751
Deaths	1,341	1,303

People wait in the observation room after getting vaccinated at KC General Hospital in Bengaluru | SHIVAKUMAR M

STATEWIDE

	APRIL 16	APRIL 17
Fresh cases	14,859	17,489
Active cases	1,07,315	1,19,160
Deaths	78	80
Recoveries	4,031	5,565
Fresh cases in B'luru Urban	9,917	11,404

17K new cases as K'taka battles bed shortage

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

Even as it is grappling with oxygen supply, ICU beds, ventilators and Remdesivir doses for Covid-19 patients, Karnataka on Saturday logged its biggest single-day spike so far at 17,489 new cases — an increase of 2,630 cases over Friday's figures. Bengaluru Urban district, which has been driving the spike in numbers, saw a whopping 11,404 fresh cases, even as it struggles with its health infrastructure.

Ironically, former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy, who tested positive for Covid-19 on Saturday, could not get a bed for himself at Manipal Hospital and had to shift to another hospital despite Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar's intervention. Deputy Chief Minister Laxman Savadi, who was in the thick of campaigning for the Lok Sabha and Assembly bypolls, too tested positive for the virus.

CONTINUED ON: P3,4

M'rashtra mulls importing O_2 via sea route

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

MAHARASHTRA is contemplating sea-route import of oxygen to keep enough supplies for Covid-19 patients. The state's daily production of oxygen is 1,200 metric tons (MT). However, the demand has surged to 1,278 MT daily.

"Many hospitals have stopped admitting Covid patients as they do not have enough oxygen to provide to patients. CM Uddhav Thackeray, in his letter to PM Modi, has said that if positive cases continue to increase, then by April-end, Maharashtra will need 2,000 MT of oxygen," said a health official.

Sources ruled out supplies by air of a large quantity of oxygen. "We are weighing seaway options for which we'd need help from the Central Government. We need to act quickly before the situation gets out of hand in hospitals," said a senior government official.

State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said the Centre has suggested bringing the supplies from faraway places where steel plants are located. P9

PM directs beefing up health infra

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

Hours after prevailing upon the largest seer group to conclude Kumbh gathering at Haridwar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday evening took stock of the Covid-19 situation.

In a video conference, the Prime Minister discussed the roadmap for scaling up the availability of vaccines and ventilators with senior officials of various Union ministries, which were directed to increase the bed count through a slew of temporary hospitals and isolation centres.

The meeting came on a day the country recorded its highest single-day spike so far (2,40,423). "The PM spoke about the need to utilise the full potential of India's pharmaceutical industry to meet the rising demand of various medicines. He was briefed on the actions taken to address the shortage of Remdesivir, whose production has been increased to reach 74.10 lakh vials/month for May against the January-February figure of 27-29 lakh vials a month," the PMO said.

CONTINUED ON: P9

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